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DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD - ERIC BARBORIAK  
DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT CHEN SHUI-BIAN'S TRANSITS IN THE UNITED STATES

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their coverage May 2 on the details of President Chen Shui-bian's transit in the U.S., legislators' proposed constitutional amendments, the corruption scandals involving First Lady Wu Shu-chen, and the year-end Taipei and Kaohsiung mayoral race. The pro-status quo "China Times" ran a banner headline on its front page that read: "[U.S. President George W.] Bush Will Personally Decide on the Cities for Bian to Transit [in the United States]." The pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" also ran a news story on its page two with the headline: "Is the United States Making Things Difficult for the President's Transits? Taiwan's Foreign Ministry: Still Negotiating [with Washington over the Issue]."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, the "Free Talk" column in the pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, pointed out that Washington's way of handling President Chen's transits may be aimed at showing its displeasure with the DPP government, but it has also humiliated all the Taiwan people. The column added that Taiwan remains an independent sovereign state no matter whether its president gets to transit in the United States. A "China Times" editorial, however, criticized Chen and Taiwan's high-ranking officials for using Taiwan's foreign relations as a tool for the island's infighting. The editorial concluded by saying that "the President's transits are actually a small matter; what really matters is that Taiwan has now become something that Washington and Beijing will jointly 'manage.'" End summary.

A) "[Taiwan] Refuses to Be a Wealthy Fool"

The "Free Talk" column in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] wrote (5/2):

"[President] A-bian will depart for a visit to Central and South America Wednesday, but as of now, the cities that he is going to stop over in the United States are undecided yet. Even a layman who knows nothing about foreign relations can tell that the U.S. government is deliberately making things difficult [for Chen]. Washington's approach may be aimed at expressing its displeasure with the DPP government, but it has humiliated all the Taiwan people. Even if A-bian is willing to accept such humiliation, are the Taiwan people willing to do so, too?"

"The fact that our president, when visiting Taiwan's allies, tend to regard his transits in other countries as a diplomatic breakthrough or achievement, is indeed a move that has put the cart before the horse. When the President makes stopovers in the United States, the most he can do is to shake hands and dine with some overseas Taiwan people. What else can he do? No matter whether the President is able to transit in the United States, Taiwan is still Taiwan and it remains to be an independent sovereign state. ..."

B) "An Incompetent and Senseless Way to Handle Diplomacy"

The pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (5/2):

" It is an unprecedented situation that our President Chen Shui-bian has no clue at all as to which cities he will stop over even though he is about to take off. But in fact there is more Taipei should worry about. ... Chen is about to depart for a trip to Paraguay and Costa Rica tomorrow, yet [until now,] the United States is reluctant to formally announce the cities that Chen can transit in; it seems that Washington does not want Taiwan to play up this issue. But despite the trouble that could cause to Chen's safety and the aviation operations, do we see any respect shown for a state leader who has no idea where he will stop over when he is about to take off? ...

"... What's worse is that Chen and other high-ranking officials have used [Taiwan's] foreign relations as a tool for the island's infighting. ... For example, the United States is Taiwan's most important ally, but the bilateral relations [between the two] have fallen from the peak to the lowest point just within a few years. The mutual trust between Taiwan and the United States built over the past years were severely damaged, and the United States' respect for the Taiwan government was significantly jeopardized; Washington's doubts are evident in the way it handles Chen's transits this time. But the President's transits are actually a small matter; what really matters is that Taiwan has now become something that Washington and Beijing will jointly 'manage.' What is it exactly that has made the United States feel that Taiwan is a more dangerous variable that Washington can hardly control than China? ..."

YOUNG